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UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000319

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SUBJECT: COSTA RICA CONTINUES TO STUMBLE TOWARD ELECTION RESULTS; ARIAS WIDENS HIS LEAD

REF: A. SAN JOSE 0283

[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 0304

[1](#)1. Summary: Oscar Arias appeared to have gotten a boost during the initial stages of a full manual vote recount from the February 5 national elections. Going into the manual count, Arias led chief rival Otton Solis by a slim 3,250 votes, with 89 percent of precincts counted. Results from the manual count of 712 precincts, which represent the final 11 percent of the national total, show Arias gaining over 10,000 votes. The Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE) has stated it will not release full results until after the manual count is complete, which could come as late as the statutorily mandated March 17. End summary.

[1](#)2. News outlets and party contacts reported on February 9 that, based on unofficial results from the partial manual vote count, presidential candidate Oscar Arias has significantly widened his lead over his chief rival, Otton Solis. Of the 712 uncounted precincts from Sunday night, some 650 had reportedly been counted by Wednesday, with Arias getting a boost of 10,650 votes from those tables alone. While electoral officials have been careful to warn against combining the results of the partial manual count with those from the partial electronic count, most observers have done just that, concluding that with all voting stations tallied, Arias leads by some 14,000 votes.

[1](#)3. After setting and missing several deadlines for the announcement of provisional election results, the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE) on Thursday reversed course, stating that it will not release vote totals until a full manual recount is complete. Several media outlets have joined the TSE in deciding not to publish or discuss any further partial

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results. With the manual recount efforts averaging 400 tables per day out of a total 6,163 tables, the TSE will have a hard time meeting its statutory deadline of March 17 for final certification of the presidential results.

[1](#)4. In an effort to keep the populace at least marginally informed, the TSE is releasing the results of each day's manual recount on its website, <http://www.tse.go.cr>. Adding to voter confusion, the website does not provide daily vote totals, much less a running tabulation of all polling stations, but rather lists the vote counts for each station separately. While this won't stop local media and party organizations from tabulating the results on their own, most citizens will be daunted by the endless rows of raw data.

[1](#)5. As the manual recount continues, the issue of how to handle nullified votes remains to be decided. Of the 1.45 million votes included in the initial counting, 21,000 were nullified by the local election boards. Embassy has learned that party officials from both the National Liberation Party (PLN) and the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) are meticulously examining each of these votes to determine whether they were properly voided. Based on anecdotal reports of contention among the examiners, it appears that stray pen marks are poised to become Costa Rica's "hanging chads."

[1](#)6. No changes were reported in the race for the Legislative Assembly, though three seats remained in contention, pending final recount. By law, the TSE has 50 working days to complete their certification of legislative elections, so it is highly unlikely that the recount for legislators will begin until after the presidential certification, with its deadline of 30 working days, is complete.

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